

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 TRSE-00 SSM-03 HA-05 NSCE-00
SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 MCT-01 ACDA-12 /096 W
-----065440 281314Z /42

O R 281217Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8462
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3577

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LE
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH SAUDI AMBASSADOR
AL-SHA'IR

1. MET WITH SAUDI AMBASSADOR ALI AL-SHA'IR JUNE 27 FOR REVIEW
OF CURRENT SITUATION. SHA'IR TALKED FOR OVER AN HOUR ABOUT
EFFORTS HE HAD MADE TO EFFECT RECONCILIATION BETWEEN PALES-
TINIANS AND CHRISTIANS. SAID HE HAD DONE EVERYTHING HE COULD
AND FINALLY HAD GIVEN UP AS RESULT OF PERSONAL ATTACKS DIREC-
TED AGAINST HIM WHICH HE SUSPECTED WERE SYRIAN INSTIGATED.
WILL NOT GO INTO DETAILS (I CAN'T BEGIN TO REMEMBER THEM FOR
ONE THING) BUT THERE ARE SOME POINTS OF INTEREST.

2. SHA'IR SAID THAT HE HAD RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS FROM FAHD
TO SEE ARAFAT AND URGE ON HIM IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION WITH
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UNIFIL AND OF NOT PROVOKING TROUBLES IN SOUTH LEBANON OR TRY-
ING INFILTRATE INTO BORDER AREAS. (TIMING THIS INSTRUCTION
SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN ABOUT MID-MAY.) HE HAD SEEN ARAFAT WHO
HAD SAID THAT PLO WAS ALREADY COOPERATING AND THAT PERSONS
INFILTRATING INTO AREA CONTROLLED BY UNIFIL WERE NOT PLO BUT
MEMBERS OF OTHER, IRRESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS. SHA'IR HAD
THEN BEEN ASKED BY SARKIS TO SEE ARAFAT AGAIN AND TRY TO CON-

VINCE HIM OF THE NEED TO VACATE POSITIONS IN THE SOUTH WHICH WERE NOT PERMITTED UNDER THE TERMS OF THE CAIRO AGREEMENT. SHA'IR HAD HAD LONG CONVERSATION WITH ARAFAT AND ABU JIHAN ON SUBJECT DURING WHICH ARAFAT SAID HE COULD NOT WITHDRAW FROM THESE POSITIONS (UNSPECIFIED) AND EXPOSE HIS REAR TO THE ENEMY.

3. SHA'IR HAD GIVEN ARAFAT HIS PERSONAL ADVICE THAT PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP MEET AND ISSUE DECLARATION THAT THEY WERE COOPERATING WITH THE UN AND THAT THEY WERE CHANGING THEIR TROOP DISPOSITIONS FOR MILITARY REASONS. THIS WOULD PERMIT THEM TO WITHDRAW FROM CERTAIN POSITIONS WITHOUT ACTUALLY SAYING THEY WERE DOING SO. ABU JIHAD HAD SAID THIS WAS A FAIR PROPOSITION AND SHA'IR HAD LEFT. HE HAD BEEN VERY SURPRISED AND ANGRY, HOWEVER, TO FIND HIMSELF BEING ATTACKED BY THE PALESTINIAN MEDIA THREE DAYS LATER AS COUNSELING A DEFEATIST APPROACH. HE HAD GONE TO ARAFAT AND DEMANDED A RETRACTION BY Wafa.

4. SUBSEQUENTLY SARKIS AND ASSAD HAD MET AT LATAKIA AND HAD AGREED ON ARRANGEMENTS FOR SENDING LEBANESE TROOPS TO THE SOUTH. THE SYRIANS HAD THEN PUT PRESSURE ON PLO TO COOPERATE AND ARAFAT HAD AGREED TO DO SO. SHA'IR HAD THEN ARRANGED A MEETING BETWEEN HOSS AND PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP TO TRY TO WORK OUT AGREEMENT ON PROCEDURES. AS HOSS HAD NOTED, THERE HAD BEEN NO AGREEMENT, BUT PALESTINIANS HAD SET FORTH THEIR POSITION.

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5. SHA'IR HAD ALSO MET SECRETLY AND SEPARATELY WITH CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL TO TRY TO SET UP PALESTINIAN-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE. HE HAD BEEN MAKING PROGRESS IN THAT RESPECT WHEN SUDDENLY HE FOUND HIMSELF BEING ATTACKED AGAIN, THIS TIME BY THE IMAM OF AN ARAB LEAGUE-FINANCED MOSQUE IN THE SABRA CAMP, WHO HAD SAID SHA'IR OPERATING UNDER MY PROTECTION. HE HAD GONE TO SARKIS AND TOLD HIM THIS WAS UNACCEPTABLE AND LEBANESE WOULD HAVE TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. LEBANESE INVESTIGATED THE MATTER AND IT BECAME CLEAR THAT IMAM IN QUESTION HAD BEEN IN SYRIAN PAY. SHA'IR SAID SYRIANS WERE CONCERNED THAT HE MIGHT BRING OFF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION WHICH WOULD RELEGATE THEM TO SECOND PLACE IN LEBANON, WHEREAS THEIR OVERRIDING PURPOSE WAS TO REMAIN THE DOMINANT FORCE HERE.

6. SHA'IR CLAIMED THAT HANI HASSAN HAD GONE TO SEE ASSAD AND HAD PLEADED WITH HIM THAT SYRIANS AND SAUDIS SHOULD COOPERATE IN LEBANON FOR THE GREATER GOOD. ASSAD HAD REFUSED AND SAID HE FEARED, FOR ANY SYRIANS WHO MIGHT TALK TO SHA'IR. SYRIANS HAD THEN ATTACKED SAUDIS AS MISGUIDED TOOLS OF IMPERIALISM.

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7. MANY PEOPLE, ACCORDING TO SHA'IR, SAID SYRIANS
CLAIMED THEY HAD BEEN GIVEN CARTE BLANCHE BY THE U.S.,
WHICH REGARDED THEIR ROLE HERE AS POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE.
I NOTED PRESIDENT SARKIS HAD DESCRIBED SYRIAN
ROLE AS PRUDENT AND, INDEED, WE THOUGHT IN GENERAL
THEY HAD TRIED TO PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE. WE HAD CER-
TAINLY NOT GIVEN THEM ANY CARTE BLANCHE, HOWEVER, AND
INDEED DID NOT HAVE GREAT INFLUENCE OVER THEIR
ACTIONS IN LEBANON. SYRIANS TENDED TO BE STUBBORN AND TO
REJECT ADVICE FROM OUTSIDERS, INCLUDING OURSELVES.

8. COMMENT. SHA'IR'S REMARKS ARE PERHAPS A LITTLE
PARANOID BUT THEY ARE INTERESTING NEVERTHELESS. HE IS
WELL INFORMED AND WELL CONNECTED. HE HAS GOOD CONTACTS
IN BOTH CHRISTIAN AND PALESTINIAN SIDES AND HAS A GOOD
FEELING FOR LEBANESE POLITICS. HIS VIEWS ABOUT SYRIAN
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INTENTIONS ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF MANY OTHERS, E.G.,
MINISTER OF INTERIOR DOUMIT, WHO FEAR SYRIANS ARE

PLANNING TO DISMEMBER COUNTRY. I FIND IT DIFFICULT, HOWEVER, TO BELIEVE SYRIANS WOULD DELIBERATELY SABOTAGE EFFORT AT NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN LEBANON, SINCE CONTINUED INSTABILITY HERE POSES DANGERS TO SYRIA MORE THAN TO ANY OTHER ARAB STATE. NEVERTHELESS, THE APPARENT DIVISIONS OF OPINION AND AUTHORITY WITHIN THE SYRIAN ESTABLISHMENT MAKE ME WONDER IF SOMEONE LIKE RIFAT AL-ASSAD OR THE SYRIAN INTELLIGENCE CHIEF, COL. GHANIM, DID NOT DECIDE THAT SHA'IR WAS CUTTING TOO WIDE A SWATHE AND START A CAMPAIGN AGAINST HIM. I NOTE ALSO THAT SYRIANS ARE ACCUSING US OF BEING SOMEHOW RESPONSIBLE FOR EHDEN MASSACRE AND THEY HAVE MADE SOME VERY UNHELPFUL STATEMENTS IN THAT REGARD.

9. SYRIAN ADF IS THE ONLY FORCE FOR ORDER IN THIS COUNTRY AND THE SYRIANS THEREFORE HAVE IMPORTANT POTENTIAL LEVERAGE, IF AND WHEN THEY WANT TO USE IT. THROUGH EVENTS LARGELY BEYOND THEIR CONTROL, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE LOST THE CONFIDENCE OF THE MARONITES AND ARE NO LONGER AS EFFECTIVE AS THEY WERE A YEAR AGO. IF THEY SEEK TO ASSERT THEIR AUTHORITY FORCEFULLY OVER ANY OF THE FACTIONS THERE WILL BE SERIOUS TROUBLE. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THEY DO NOT REMAIN AS A CREDIBLE DETERRENT THERE IS GOING TO BE EVEN MORE SERIOUS TROUBLE. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO LIVE WITH THEIR PRESENCE, BUT IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF THERE WERE A LITTLE MORE MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN US. AS OF NOW, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THE SYRIANS ARE INCREASINGLY SUSPICIOUS OF US AND THIS MAY LEAD THEM INTO FOOLISH ACTIONS.
PARKER

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